Interviewee: Richard "Dick" Brownlee
Interviewer: Thomas Saylor
Date of interview: 2 July 2003
Location: enclosed porch, the Brownlee home, White Bear Township, MN
Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, December 2003

Dick Brownlee was born on 11 July 1925 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. An only child, his parents moved to St. Paul, Minnesota when he was young, and he grew up there, graduating from Central High School in 1943. Immediately thereafter Dick was inducted into the Army Air Corps.

Dick had Basic Training at Amarillo, Texas, gunnery training at Kingman, Arizona, and crew training for B-17 heavy bombers at Rapid City, South Dakota. In mid-1944 his crew was shipped to England and attached to the 410th Squadron, 94th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, at Bury St. Edmonds. Personnel requirements led to Dick being assigned to a replacement pool, but he soon was posted to a crew, as a tail gunner. On his third mission with this crew, on 6 October 1944, their B-17 was shot down by enemy aircraft, and Dick bailed out over Germany.

Dick was held briefly at an interrogation facility, Dulag Luft, then moved to a POW camp, Stalag Luft III at Sagan, southeastern Germany (present day Poland), where he remained until 27 January 1945. As the Soviet Red Army advanced, prisoners were evacuated that day by the Germans, and after a rail journey Dick ended up at Stalag XIII-B, in Nuremburg. In April this camp too was evacuated, and thus Dick was on a forced march in southern Bavaria with other POWs when liberated by the Americans in late April. He spent time at Camp Lucky Strike, Le Havre, France, before being returned to the US. Dick was discharged in October 1945 with the rank of sergeant.

Again a civilian, Dick returned to the Twin Cities area, and used GI Bill benefits to obtain a business degree from the University of Minnesota; he subsequently worked many years for the 3M Company, retiring in 1985. Dick was married in 1949 (wife Barbara), and raised a family of six children. At the time of this interview (July 2003) he lived in White Bear Township, Minnesota.

Interview Key:
T = Thomas Saylor
D = Dick Brownlee
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: This is an interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is the 2nd of July, 2003, and this is our interview with Mr. Dick Brownlee of White Bear Township, Minnesota. First, Mr. Brownlee, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

D: Yes. You bet.

T: It's going to be about ninety degrees today, and you've got a nice cool porch for the record. Nice place to be. Well, we've talked a little bit and I've learned that you were born on July 11, 1925 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but you moved to the St. Paul area when you were less than a year old. Attended local schools here, graduating from St. Paul Central High School 1943. You volunteered for the US Army Air Corps in 1943 and were trained as a gunner on B-17 Flying Fortress aircraft. In 1944 you shipped over to England and were stationed with the 94th Bomb Group, 410th Squadron, at Bury St. Edmunds in England. You flew three missions as a member of a… you were in a replacement pool, and you flew three missions and on your third mission, that's the 6th of October 1944, your plane was shot down on a mission to Berlin. You spent time in several POW facilities before being liberated in April of 1945. Spent some time at Camp Lucky Strike in Le Havre, France, and then back to the US. You were discharged in October of 1945 with the rank of sergeant. After the war you went to the University of Minnesota Minneapolis and in rather quick order finished a degree in business, using GI Bill benefits. You worked many years for 3M here in the Twin Cities area, and retired in 1985.

On the personal side, you were married in 1949. Your wife's name is Barbara and you've been blessed with six children. Well, I wanted to ask you, when the US entered the war on December 7, 1941 you were a sixteen-year-old high school student. I'm wondering if you remember what you were doing when you first heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

D: As I recall we were with some friends of ours. My folk's friends. One of them was my age and I remember hearing about this and thinking boy, that we were all kind of aghast. But at that age I was… it was kind of an excited day in a way, but just kind of wondering what was going to happen next. But it did add a new dimension to life and interest.

(1, A, 71)

T: How long was it before it occurred to you that this war, this world war, might involve you?

D: I don't think that it did right away but I suppose maybe in the next year or so I probably began to think that this will probably involve me.

T: When those thoughts crossed your mind, how do you remember that making you feel? Excited that you'll be part of this, nervous, scared?

D: No, I don't think I was nervous or scared. I guess that… you know with everybody going it was just kind of well, that's going to happen to me. You began to think about what you're going to do and Air Force seemed the glamorous type thing. Everybody wanted to be a pilot of course.

T: You too?

D: Oh, sure. But when we went down… when I was still going to school we went to volunteer for the Air Force and so we went down to Sioux Falls, South Dakota and took a physical down there. As part of that I found out that my eyesight was not good enough for a pilot so I was considered aircrew, for aircrew training.

T: So you knew that when you went in that was what you were going to be into.

D: Yes.

T: Now you volunteered and you volunteered… you went into the service actually before your eighteenth birthday.

D: Yes.

(1, A, 98)

T: Or right after. You were an only child growing up, right?

D: Right.

T: How did your folks respond to your desire to volunteer for the service?

D: Well, I think that in the context of everybody going I don't think that they were surprised but they were not… they never really expressed themselves. I knew that they felt… not bad that I volunteered. I think that they seemed okay with that but always nervous about what's going to happen to you.

T: Do you recall your mom or your dad trying to or encouraging you to wait or think it over?

D: No.

T: So they were… and there was, you mentioned kind of an expectation of young men going. That you were going to be part of this anyway.

D: Sure.

T: Well you went far away from Minnesota for your training. You did Basic Training at Amarillo, Texas, and you had some gunnery training in beautiful Cayman, Arizona. How did you handle being in quite different parts of the country from where you'd grown up?

D: Well, I thought it was interesting. I felt good about seeing parts of the country that I hadn't seen. And of course everybody was from somewhere else practically. I always thought that Texans had a reputation for being braggarts about where they came from but I finally concluded that Minnesotans were at least as bad if not worse.

T: Did you meet other Minnesotans or encounter Minnesotans in your training experience?

D: Yes.

T: What kind of people did you find yourself gravitating towards for companions or friends when you were in training situations?

(1, A, 128)

D: Well, I probably… you know, there's always quite a mixture and there were some that were heavy drinkers and so forth which I certainly was not and I suppose the more quiet ones and practically… some of them were a little bit older. When you first get into Basic Training of course everybody's young and they're all kind of… just high school kids. I remember that it took about… after a couple months people had quieted down and lost that… seemed to have grown up quickly.

T: How do you explain that? What brought about this rapid maturing process?

D: I suppose being away from home and being treated as a man instead of a kid. I mean you were expected… you know we were in there with people who were ten, twenty years older than we were, some of them. We saw them, the older ones. They had more trouble with this than those of us that were young. It was kind of an adventure.

T: I see. So the older ones in Basic Training had a little more difficult time.

D: Yes. True.

T: What's your most memorable experience from Basic Training?

D: I don't know. Amarillo, Texas, was an experience in itself.

T: Can you talk about that?

D: It was just hot and just kind of… it was with a bunch of guys. All of us were away from home. So we established some friendship with like people. We'd go to church and just try to live as normal a life as we could. Maybe have a beer occasionally which maybe was a new experience for some of us. But it was, I'd say it took maybe a couple weeks or months and all of a sudden you're kind of different. You're not a kid anymore.

(1, A, 164)

T: When you were training you were trained as a gunner on B-17 aircraft. Describe that kind of training. How does one get to be proficient gunner?

D: One of the things that they do they send you to gunnery school and some they send to a training school either for a mechanic or gunnery armorer or a radio operator. Many people had both that skill and the aerial gunner experience. Fortunately I had… I didn't have that experience. I was… they had enough of the other categories so I was a gunner and went to gunnery school and then I was sent into a processing center to go overseas.

T: Did that make the whole process of getting posted to a unit and going overseas faster then because…?

D: Yes. It did.

T: So the Air Force… it sounds like the Air Corps decided what they needed. From your description they had enough mechanics or armorers and they could make you just a basic gunner and get you over there faster.

D: Yes.

T: Well, you went overseas in early summer 1944 to England. England is a different place too. What were your impressions of being over in Europe?

D: I really liked it. I really liked it. I used to read a lot and of course a lot of the novels were Robin Hood type things where you're in the English countryside and I guess it met my expectations and I liked the English and I liked the country and people were very accommodating and really seemed to like Americans.

T: Did you have an opportunity to come into contact with the local population?

D: Yes. Yes. As a matter of fact I did make contact with several different people and I got to know a girl of course who was in the English service corps of some kind. Met in London. With a friend. And I was with a friend. She, her folks lived out near our airbase so I had an opportunity to see her once at home and I maintained that contact and eventually when I was going to college took a trip to Europe and reestablished that. I still write her today.

(1, A, 202)

T: No kidding.

D: Yes.

T: Here it is sixty years later.

D: She's come over here and visited us.

T: That's very interesting. So it's one of those contacts that even after you were back here in the States that you found fruitful.

D: Yes. Pretty nice girl.

T: She must be about your age now, right?

D: Yes.

T: What was it… when you found the English… how would you describe them and why they were easy to get along with for you?

D: I got the impression that most of them liked the Americans and they always treated us kindly. I don't suppose they had an awful lot of contact because you only really had the contact when you were on leave or someplace like that, going to London. I thought they were very nice people.

T: What about London? You mentioned going there a couple times. What are your impressions of that city?

D: Great city. Great city. I felt kind of… I found a way to get around on the metro, I mean the underground. I felt pretty proud of myself that I could find my way around and know where to go. So always a good experience going to London. People were friendly and I remember going in having a social drink at the bar with some other Americans that you could see some of the English citizens would kind of move over a little, get a bit closer and make some kind of contact with you and start a conversation. I thought that was neat.

(1, A, 225)

T: It sounds like from your perspective the American-English relationship was a positive one.

D: Yes.

T: When you were in England it was clear you were part of the Allied war effort against Germany. What kind of image did you have in your mind of the Germans? What kind people were they? What kind of enemy were they?

D: That's an interesting question. I don't know that I really thought about it. I guess I didn't see them really as… they were the enemy of course but I didn't see that they were all wild men or something like that. They were guys just like us that didn't have an awful lot of choice. You do what you have to do. And I guess in terms of the civilian population when you're in the Air Force you're not thinking about killing off a bunch of civilians.

T: You may never see them.

D: Never see anything. That's the thing about the Air Force. You really don't see anybody.

T: Whether it's people on the ground or in other planes.

D: Right.

T: Does that make the war easier or more difficult to fight for you?

D: I'd say it's easier. For me it was getting on the plane and going over and getting back again.

T: Almost sitting in an isolated chamber removed from the war but part of it at the same time.

D: Yes.

(1, A, 247)

T: Do you remember the first mission that you flew? Combat mission that you flew?

D: Yes. I was just trying to think where we went. Anyway, it was down I think in southern Germany. We flew down there and bombed something. Never really saw any opposition, so I remember looking down there and thinking, "That's Germany down there." It's a very impersonal… just kind of going along. You didn't have any

opposition, fighter opposition. I got home, back to the base, and thought that wasn't too bad.

T: I guess it sounds like it might create a false sense of reality as far as what those missions were like.

D: Yes.

T: Were you nervous before you took off on this first mission or after all the training were you confident and relaxed?

D: I don't think I was confident and relaxed. You'd have to be nuts to do that. There was a certain amount of excitement that this is the real thing. I was… it never occurred to me that anything would happen. I knew that it could.

T: You mentioned this before we were taping. I mean, obviously, being shot down is part of the risk that every aircrew runs. You knew that planes… you knew in your mind that planes had gotten shot down. Why did it never occur to you that it might be you?

D: I guess at the time that I was flying in there, there had been… this was further in the war and they hadn't had much… many attacks from enemy aircraft for quite a while because a lot of the German aircraft had been destroyed. So it was primarily a question of anti-aircraft fire which was pretty deadly. But, you know, you just don't think about it I guess.

(1, A, 277)

T: Did you experience anti-aircraft fire or flak on any of the missions that you flew?

D: Yes. We did. The first mission I went on… it was an overcast day and they had to cast out the chaff which was tinsel. It must have thrown the radar off because we could see the anti-aircraft explosions off to the side but perhaps a mile away.

T: That's what this chaff was supposed to do was to sort of mess up ground radar.

D: Yes. That's what it was supposed to do and it apparently was doing that. So that was kind of… well, that's good. When we got through of course nobody… how we came back probably differently but I don't remember any enemy fire from that.

T: Were you flying as a waist gunner on that particular mission, your first one?

D: No. I ended up as a tail gunner. I had been trained as a waist gunner but I was… this crew that I was assigned to the waist gunner had gotten shot up a bit so they needed somebody new. I was there and they said… and I was eager, being a spare gunner, to get into this thing. So I volunteered and they said, "There's a tail gun spot

open on this plane crew and if you want that you can." I said, "Okay. Sure I'd like that."

T: You were… you mentioned before we started taping once you got over to England you didn't end up flying with the crew that you shipped over with and you sat around for a while.

D: Yes.

T: How was that to sit around at a base when that wasn't really what you went over there for?

D: Not very good. It was very boring. Not much to do and I remember thinking to myself, "My gosh, this thing is going to be over and I won't even have a chance to get into it." Which I look back on with kind of strange feelings now.

(1, A, 302)

T: It's amazing what maturity can do.

D: That's right. It is.

T: So in a sense you volunteered to get onto this…?

D: Oh, yes. I went up to the operations officer and said, "I understand that this one crew has had some trouble and there's a couple openings and I'd like to get on one of those." He kind of looked at me kind of surprised and said, "Okay. Sure. There's this tail gun spot open." [I said,] "I'll take it."

T: Was that crew that you were with on the first mission, did you fly all your missions with them?

D: Yes.

T: You were shot down on your third mission. For the record.

D: Right.

T: During gunnery training in Kingman, Arizona, you mentioned you had tried out or practiced on all the gun positions.

D: Yes.

T: What was that like to really in a sense to watch the war going backwards?

D: Well, it depends upon what you saw looking backwards of course. *(chuckles)* In some ways it was probably best. You were seeing what you had been through. On the other hand, when we were attacked you could see that too.

T: And it was on your third mission. Did you use your guns on either of your first two missions?

(1, A, 319)

D: No. Except to test fire. They asked you always to rattle off a few rounds to make sure the guns were going and so forth, but not really.

T: So the first time you used them actually against enemy aircraft was on that third mission, the one you were shot down on.

D: Yes.

T: Because there were only three missions, I guess I can ask you… your first two missions, your second pretty similar to the first as far as lack of activity?

D: Yes. We went to Bremen the first day and to… I don't know what the second one was.

T: So your first mission was to Bremen? Up north?

D: Bremen. Up north. Yes.

T: And your second one. One thing about flying missions from England to central Germany or southern Germany, to Berlin as well, and back is that it's an awful lot of time in the plane. During the time are you in the tail gun seat once the plane takes off?

D: No. No. As I recall we'd always take off and land in the radio room which is the midsection of the plane. And then I think we'd kind of hang out there until the pilot told us to take our positions and then we would do that. That was when we were in a ways, you know.

T: So you had several hours either way…

D: Yes.

T: Those couple missions to just sort of sit around.

D: Yes.

(1, A, 336)

T: Now these planes are not pressurized. When you went in altitude they got a little cold.

D: Yes.

T: Was that cold something that was difficult to deal with?

D: No, not as I remember because we had heated suits and so it really didn't feel… really didn't experience any discomfort that I remember.

T: How did you pass the time… hours either way?

D: You couldn't really talk to each other unless you… The only way to talk because the noise was loud… these planes weren't insulated. If you're with somebody you'd have to take off or expose your ear and shout in somebody's ear right next to you.

T: So it was really pretty noticeably loud from the engines.

D: Oh, yes. Yes. It was just… sure it was. And you could talk over the interphone but we really didn't do that because they didn't want to have that picked up anywhere.

T: So you had a number of hours to sort of sit by yourself and not communicate.

D: Yes.

T: The tail gunner position… can you walk us through that third mission when you were actually shot down? What transpired there from the time when you were actually engaged by enemy aircraft to when the plane started to go down?

D: Well, my remembrance of it is I was… our plane was the… was a part of the 94th [Bomb] Group, and for some reason or other we ended up being the last plane in the formation and being in the tail I was the last person in the formation. *(chuckles)*

(1, A, 358)

T: So when you looked out your window there really wasn't anything behind you.

D: Well, the only thing behind us was… there was another group at our level. It's hard to tell how many miles back but it was probably… you know, because there's nothing to obscure your vision, but… it could have been five miles back or three. I don't know. Anyway, they were more dots than they were actual aircraft that I could see. They were coming along at our level, and as I was in the tail there I noticed that coming in from the left side of the plane a cloud of some other images, for lack of a better word, which I assumed were probably German aircraft.

T: You could see these out of your left peripheral vision.

D: Yes. No. I could see them out of my right peripheral, because I'm in the back of this thing.

T: Right. So they're coming in from the left, which is your right, because you're sitting backwards. Got it.

D: Yes. And so, as I watched these two get closer and closer, when they came together I could see flashes. Just little flashes of gunfire, and pretty soon I could see some of what were our aircraft drifting off to the side going down, being shot down. That was pretty spooky. I remember… my recollection tells me that they were all gone, but that doesn't seem logical. They may have been taking some other kind of action too. But the thing I remember then is, after that happened, then these enemy planes are coming up, picking up on <u>us</u> now. Coming at <u>us</u>.

T: They fly faster than the bombers.

D: Yes. So the first plane came in, and I remember firing at it, and it turned off to the right of our plane, my left, and then another one came on my right, the left side of the plane, and for some reason or other my guns had jammed, and so I watched this plane as it was firing at us. The first plane had made some hit on us, because I remember the – TAPE ENDS

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

D: I remember the ball turret gunner calling out that he'd been hit and the radio operator said, "O.K. I'll send somebody back." He said, "I'm hit bad." By that time the other plane was coming in on us, firing at us, and my guns were jammed, and I was told in training that even though they wouldn't fire I should point at them to make them think that they were being fired at. When he turned off after he finished firing, I can remember seeing, being very impressed with the crosses on the wings, you know, that German fighters had. Then things were kind of quiet. I realized that we were losing airspeed. We were actually going down, but level.

T: But you couldn't see if your plane was falling behind the group at all.

D: No. No, I couldn't see that, and I couldn't see anybody in the crew because the tail gunner space on a B-17, the back wheel pulled up into the fuselage and you couldn't see around it without going up close to it.

T: So in a sense you were in your own little world back here.

D: Right. In my own little world. And so from my perspective then everything was… we were going level. I didn't hear anything else, didn't see anything else. So I thought I better find out. As long as I can't talk on the interphone I might as well go

back and see what's happening. So I unhooked my parachute and some of the other paraphernalia, the radio and so forth, and started crawling back towards the tail wheel to get towards the front of the plane to see what was going on. I started to pass out because we were high enough so there wasn't enough oxygen so I crawled back to my position and hooked up the oxygen and then I looked out the… we were still flying, still level… as far as I could see. I looked out to the right hand side of the plane, my left, and saw a parachute going down, which was close enough so that I realized that it was from our plane.

T: People were bailing out and you didn't know it.

D: Right. So I thought, "That's enough for me." I unhooked again and went back to the escape door.

(1, B, 440)

T: You had your parachute on this time?

D: Had my parachute on. Yes. There was a red handle there [on the inside of the aircraft] that if you pulled it, it would pull the hinge pins out and the door would fly off. So I grabbed this and pulled hard, and nothing happened. And I remember thinking to myself, "Well, I guess this is it." And it was not a panicky feeling. It was very calm. But I was angry at the handle and so I reached out and just really gave it a yank and it pulled out finally and the door flew off and I fell out of the door. I just kind of dove out. In a few seconds, when I was away, I pulled the ripcord for my chute, and I didn't react immediately so I pulled it out the rest of the way. And all of a sudden I realized that it had worked and I was jerked to a standing position with some great force. I felt kind of woozy, so I just kind of let myself go limp in the chute until I kind of got my breath back. I remember hearing the sound of firing in the background. I didn't really look at anything. But there was apparently some other battle going on there. I just kind of went limp. Maybe I passed out a bit. I don't know.

Anyway, the flight down was… we were about noon. It was a beautiful, sunny October day on the 6th of October, and I'm floating down all alone. Didn't see anybody else around anywhere and [I'm] watching the German farmland, countryside go below me. Just kind of drifting down. I remember trying to determine where I was going to land, because there were some trees and forest stuff there besides the farmland and I thought, "Gosh, I don't want to drop into a forest with this thing." Anyway, it seemed like a while to come down, but it was fairly simple and not scary. When I finally got close enough so I had some depth perception, I realized I was going pretty fast and I remember crossing over a road, a tar road and landing in a plowed field, kind of spinning around and going backwards. The first thing I did, after I laid there about a second, then I looked kind of half up and looked to see if my parachute was collapsed, because that was the thing they'd always told us in training, to make sure that that doesn't drag you anywhere. So if it was full, you were supposed to get up and run and jump on the

thing so it wouldn't take you along. But it was collapsed, and so I just kind of relaxed and kind of lay my head back for a moment on the dirt there. I don't think there was… it wasn't very long. I had my eyes closed. The next thing I knew somebody was talking to me, in English.

(1, B, 510)

T: In English.

D: Yes. There was a small group from the town there, and somebody spoke English. It was a small gathering of small town people, and as I recall there was maybe somebody there with a uniform on, maybe home guard or something for all I know, because it was just a farm community. I unhooked my... with these people looking down at me on the ground… I unhooked my parachute harness and slipped out of that. I had some silk gloves on which were liners for the electric gloves that we had to use in the plane, and I just threw those on the ground while I was unhooking my parachute. I remember when I stood up, there was this little elderly woman there who had picked these gloves up, and very gently handed those to me. They were something I really didn't need, but she certainly seemed to be a nice grandmotherly type person. I think everybody was surprised at how young I was. I was nineteen.

T: So this is your first encounter with the Germans… was not an unpleasant one. Someone spoke English and the old woman gave you your gloves back.

D: Yes.

T: I want to ask about the plane. When you crawled into the back from your position at the end to the section to get out, did you see anybody else?

D: No.

T: So you don't know whether they were dead or had left the plane or…?

D: No.

T: Did you ever find out what happened to those people?

(1, B, 536)

D: As I think I said, I saw their parachutes so I knew somebody went out of the plane. Yes, I did. But I mean I didn't… I actually… no I didn't. I didn't know what had happened to them, but I knew… I didn't have any idea who got out. But I found out later that the ball turret gunner who had been hurt, been hit, he did get out. And the radio operator got out. I actually ran across the radio operator, but the rest of the crew as far as I could see was killed.

T: It was also I guess tough from your perspective to tell how the plane was hit or what was damaged or anything else.

D: Yes.

T: That's one of the things, I guess, of being in the tail is that you mentioned that you couldn't see, and luckily you thought enough to go forward to get out of the plane.

D: Yes. It's kind of so what the heck's going on here, you know.

T: You didn't hear any voices in your ear?

D: No.

T: Perhaps because they had either left the plane or been killed.

D: Well the plane seemed to be going down but it was very level. I thought "What the heck's happened? I better find out."

T: Thank goodness you did. When you hit the ground it doesn't sound like… you haven't described any injuries. You weren't wounded or hadn't broken anything…?

D: No. When I landed I was coming down sideways. I went across the road and when I hit this plowed field it just kind of spun me a quarter of the way around and I went down on my back. I just raised up and made sure my parachute was collapsed. Then I just kind of relaxed and lay there for a while.

(1, B, 563)

T: What were your, if you can recall, what were your thoughts or your feelings at the moment when you hit the ground and you realized well, this is the situation now?

D: I don't know. At nineteen I guess you don't have much fear, you know. I didn't think anything bad would happen to me. It was pretty obvious that the war was in the process of being won, and so I don't remember being fearful at all.

T: What did those local civilians, these local people, what did they do with you? Did they take you to a local holding facility or… what did they do with you exactly?

D: They walked me into this town, which was fairly close. I suppose it was maybe, I don't know, maybe a mile, maybe not. No. I don't think it was that far even. I remember being… you know, I had this flight suit on so I'm walking in these fur boots, which are kind of a klutzy thing. I think somebody… It seems to me that somebody carried something for me as I recall. What it was now that I think about it.

It was just a small group in the town and they were all… I remember looking at the scenery thinking to myself, "Now I need to remember all this so I can describe it when I get home." It was just a crossroads type town. I remember them taking me into what was probably a pub. It had a big window in the front of it that you could look into. They were sure that I had all kinds of gun and so forth and they kept saying "Pistole" [German: pistol], and I said "No." That's one thing they told us: Don't carry a gun with you. That's about the best way to get shot there is. You're not going to fight your way out of anything. So they wanted to search me, so I took off my stuff and I thought I was going to have to strip with this whole gang watching in front. I thought well, "Shoot, I don't care." I took off the flight suit and stuff like that. They could see I wasn't carrying anything. I put back some of the stuff.

Then I went over to… they took me over to another building in this small community area. Some office type buildings. It was an Air Force building there I think. I remember getting in there, and they had a couple of straight-backed chairs. Just regular dining room table things. And sitting in one of those was another fellow from our plane. Then there was a chair for me. I sat down in that chair. They interrogated us some, but I didn't know anything.

T: These are just local officials now, right?

(1, B, 609)

D: Yes, but they were some military. It was some kind of a small military outpost of some kind. There were a few guys in uniform, but it certainly wasn't anything very big. Maybe it was their home guard for all I know. Then as I remember, a horse-drawn wagon with a couple of old German soldiers, and I mean <u>older</u>, were there. They were running this thing and on it was a bed of straw, and our radio operator was there. He was consoling the ball turret gunner who had had his heel shot off. Shot anyway. That was all wound up and stuff, and they had a tourniquet on it and some German medics from the soldiers had told us, don't open that tourniquet because he might very well bleed to death. So there was some concern on the Germans' part that this fellow would slip away from us. The other fellow from the crew and myself got onto this so there were four of us then from our crew. I think those were probably all of the survivors. They took us on this horse-drawn cart to some kind of a military establishment that we got off on and then they continued on to a hospital with this wounded fellow, a crewman of ours. So that's the last I saw of him.

T: So you were together now with two other members of your crew who had also not been injured.

D: Right. Right.

T: At this first facility here, were you kept at this facility now longer than you had been at that first?

D: As I remember, but you know it's a little bit foggy, but the next thing I remember is being in what I would call a processing center. This was a place we were given showers, which felt great, and given some new clothing. It was Allied clothing. As I recall I was given some British boots or shoes. Army type shoes. And some GI trousers. I had a British battle jacket, as I remember, and a cap of some kind.

T: So none of the clothing was yours.

(1, B, 645)

D: No. It was all… they had given us clean underwear. Now let me just think now. That's what happened. And I think the sequence is right on this. Then they took us to some kind of an establishment near there which was a holding ground and they put each one of us into a solitary room by ourselves that had a window with fogged glass so you couldn't see outside, and bars of course, and a cot. I'm sure it was a psychological thing, because you see tally marks made on the side of the wood bed that would lead you to think that this person had been there for twenty-eight days or something like that.

T: Right.

D: They came and interrogated. They took me out and asked me what I knew, and I remember the fellow who interrogated me was a German who had a job or something, I think in Los Angeles. He spoke English as American as I did. I don't know how he came back to Germany. He told me his favorite cigarettes were Chesterfields and asked me different questions, but of course I really didn't know anything.

T: They knew you were an enlisted nineteen year old gunner.

D: Yes. Yes. It was a nice enough thing. It wasn't hard or anything like that. Did that and then went back to the solitary confinement. They waited a period of time. Then they sent us…

T: Were you interrogated only that one time?

D: Yes.

T: By that one fellow. And the way you describe it doesn't sound like it lasted all that long.

D: No. No. I'm sure that they… you know… I'm sure that they knew by experience that people like myself really didn't know anything that they didn't know.

T: Were you threatened with any kind of physical punishment or struck at all in any way?

D: No. No. None at all.

(1, B, 675)

T: So this, although you were at this facility a number of days, it wasn't physically difficult in any way it sounds like.

D: No. It was just… pretty darn hard to be in solitary confinement, I'll tell you that. They of course did that so that you would feel like talking.

T: Yes. What went through your mind now as you're sitting there in a cell by yourself making your own little marks on the wood now?

D: Oh, I don't know. Just bored I guess. Wondering what was going to happen. Not in a fearful way. No, I wasn't scared at all. Just kind of bored.

T: From what you've described in any of the situations you'd been in you hadn't been given any reason to feel scared.

D: No.

T: No threatening villagers, no…

D: No.

T: Any estimation from you how long you remained in that solitary confinement facility?

D: Oh, I don't know. It seemed a lot longer than it was. As I recall, it was a matter of days. It could have been anywhere from three to five, but I don't know.

T: It wasn't a month.

D: No.

T: Did you come into contact with any of the other Americans at this time or were you really by yourself?

(1, B, 691)

D: No. After we got out of this then they put us in this kind of pool… a bunch of guys from all over the place that were just waiting for some kind of assignment to different camps. I remember there was an American major or something like that was… I'm sure he was a POW too… that was kind of in charge of that thing. Just kind of hung out.

T: This time you were mixing with other POWs.

D: Yes. And of course, they knew, you get everybody all together and you've been in solitary confinement for three, four days and so everybody wants to talk. Everybody's got a story. I imagine… we always kind of laughed and thought they really must have had microphones in there, but I don't know what they could pick up from anybody, but maybe they did.

T: Did you stay there for any period of time or was that just kind of a quick stop?

D: It was kind of a quick stop. My head tells me that it might have been a week, maybe a little longer. I don't know. Then we got shipped to a camp near… in northeastern Germany. I guess I used to hear the town Stettin mentioned.

T: Did you go by truck or by rail? How did you get there?

D: I have no idea. I hadn't thought about a truck. It could have been a truck. But I don't… No, maybe it was a train. Because everybody had the uniforms that they were given. That's really kind of a vague thing. I guess all things were just kind of blurry at that time.

T: So transportation to the first camp you were at in the north. We were looking at a map before we started taping, and this could possibly have been Luft One which was near Barth, or Grosstychow, Luft Four. Both of which are located near Stettin. What do you remember about that first camp that you were at?

D: I remember that it looked like Minnesota. It was… pine trees and the snow around. It looked like you were in the northern part of the state.

T: So it was fairly flat?

(1, B, 723)

D: Yes. It was fairly flat. It was snowy. Snow around. There was… I forget if there were four compounds there or not, but they each had maybe ten barracks and they were long. Just two stories or something like that.

T: So this compound that you were in, perhaps one of four, was only Americans?

D: Yes.

T: Was it, do you recall, enlisted as well as officers or just enlisted?

D: Just enlisted.

T: How long were you at that facility, if you estimate? Were you there for Christmas?

D: Yes. I was there for Christmas [1944].

T: For New Years?

D: Yes. I was there. We probably started marching out of there at the end of January and maybe even February, the first part of February.

T: That camp in the north of Germany which may have been Luft Four as we look at the map. What do you remember about the daily routine there? How things went from day to day?

D: I remember that we… they had a certain number of built bunks, double-decker bunks, but they were overcrowded so there were probably… in our room, in the barracks there were a bunch of different rooms, just like any other barracks I guess. There were probably six to seven of us that had to sleep on the floor. I remember having a mattress that was paper covered and had shredded cardboard or something that was soft rather than… I guess we realized the treatment was the best that they were able to give. Things were pretty tight then. We were probably more of a burden than we were anything else.

They would bring in the food. Usually we had some American Red Cross stuff that was packaged. Maybe breakfast food or things like that as I remember. It's been a long time ago. We each got a half a parcel which was meant to be a full parcel, but we each got a half. I don't know why, but… But the Germans used to give us a meal in the morning and the evening.

T: What did that consist of?

(1, B, 753)

D: Well, potatoes for one thing. They would give us potatoes, and we would use some meats and things out of our Red Cross parcel to go with that. But the staple that they gave us was potatoes, and we would boil those up and cook them and then… you'd be surprised how creative some people can get in the time you take when you don't have anything else to do. Some guys would really get creative.

And they'd give us a ration of bread. I think we had… it was a half of a half of a loaf. Maybe even a quarter of a loaf. So we had this bread that we could… we got so we could slice it really thin and make sandwiches with something with the Red Cross parcel, which had cheese and some different things like that in it. Jelly. And once in a while somebody used to get a parcel from home. But we used to get something to eat at noon as I remember, and at night.

T: You mentioned not much to do. How did you pass your time during the days? It's wintertime after all.

D: They used to let us out and we could walk around the compound in the wintertime.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A, begins at counter 000.

T: You mentioned they did let you out of the barracks. On a daily basis? On a regular basis?

D: Yes. Get exercise. This was a regular standard POW camp so it had… it was built for that. I remember we'd maybe get an extra time out at Christmas, on Christmas Day or something like that. It was kind of boring but I mean… you could get books. There was a library there that the YMCA I think had supplied, the American Y. So you could do some reading. You always get somebody that's got a radio. You're not supposed to have but they did. Somebody in the camp had one and they would listen to this, to some kind of an English news broadcast and then there would be some kind of a gathering someplace that people would go to and come back to the barracks and say this is what… they guy would come around and say this is what they heard.

T: So it was possible to kind of keep up with the outside world or with the news of the war in any case.

D: Yes. We just knew it was a matter of time.

T: Did you work at all in the camp?

D: No.

T: Did you work at all outside the camp?

D: I've talked to people who had. I think that would have been preferable. Give you something to do. Otherwise you just had time on your hands.

T: Which you've mentioned a number of times you had plenty of time on your hands.

D: Yes.

T: So there was a lending library as it were and you got some fresh air. Were there church or chapel services at this camp?

D: Yes. There were. I was just trying to remember what form those took. I think the first camp that I was at, the one that was a real regular camp that was operated that way. Yes, there were church services. Because there were a lot of German soldiers that were Christians. I was just trying to think. We had church services at Nuremberg too, but I don't quite remember them as well. But we always had those.

T: Do you remember the Germans themselves at this first camp? What kind of people were they?

(2, A, 58)

D: Well, the commander of the camp I think was a technical sergeant as I recall. That's what they… he was quite a humanitarian person. He seemed to be a very straightforward person who did the job right. He had a job to do. He tried to give what he could give. He would stay within that jurisdiction, but sometimes I remember… on Christmas we were there and maybe New Year's too where they kind of opened the area during the day and relaxed things a bit. They had some kind of a show that we put on. I remember that the commandant attended that. Typical GI show. A lot of laughing and stuff. So it was… there wasn't anybody that was you know… I do remember when we… at the second place when we marched from Nuremberg south, when we were all walking, there was a lot of guards there that were old guys.

T: When you're nineteen they seemed old.

D: These guys are really struggling and feet were sore and things. So some of the GIs would carry their rifles for them and stuff like that.

T: If that isn't an indication of the end.

D: At the end you could always… you could hear the guns coming. So it was just a matter of time.

T: Now you were evacuated from the first camp as the Soviet Army got closer.

D: Right.

T: How much advance warning do you remember having that you were to be moved from that first camp?

D: Oh, boy. I don't know. I guess… it didn't seem like real short notice as I recall it. This was not something that the Germans would be happy about telling us I guess.

T: Or doing, I suppose.

D: Or doing. No. No.

T: It sounds like a nightmare.

D: Yes.

(2, A, 105)

T: How did you get from that first camp to Nuremberg? That's quite a long distance.

D: They put us on railcars, and that's one of the things as I think back on it I remember. I forget it took us… I forget how long it took us, but these were these small European boxcars, and they put enough of us in there so that not everybody could lay down or sit down at the time. Some of the guys would have to stand. They would give us some food and a pail. Everybody had something to hold it in. But my recollection was that the train had its schedule, and the fellows who were taking care of us were not really not made aware of that schedule so they didn't know when the train was going to stop. The real critical issue turned out to be water, drinking water. I'll tell you one thing that I remember very distinctly is, that when you're thirsty man, you don't think about anything else but water. So when they would stop sometimes the guards would try to get out and bring some water in and so forth. But they didn't really know how long the train was going to stop, and they didn't want to get left there. You have to open the door, which I suppose if anybody was going to leap out or something… but everybody thought, this thing is almost over. I'm not going to take a chance at getting shot somewhere. It's stupid. Yes, I remember being <u>obsessed</u> with the thought of water. Food was fine but boy, water is really critical.

T: And you were on these boxcars for a number of days, to get from north to south.

D: Yes. And sometimes we'd be sitting in a marshalling area. I remember sitting in a marshalling yard in Germany and hearing bombs fall thinking, "My God, we're going to get caught in the middle of an air raid here."

T: Of our own planes.

(2, A, 140)

D: Yes. And I remember one of the guards saying, "*Kameraden*" [German: friends, or allies] and pointing up at the sky. Guys were saying, "Baloney! They're no friends of ours!"

T: You were inside the railcars when those bombs were falling. How do you deal with that when you can't get away from those bombs?

D: There is no way to deal with it. You just… you end up shaking, like this. *(shakes hand violently up and down, as if nervous)* It's not… something you can't… you try to put your hand on and keep it from doing that, but it's just your nerves, I guess. But you think, "Gee, you don't want to get caught in this." I don't know whether I thought enough about it. You know, what if I was a German and this was happening to me all the time? I've thought about that recently watching television about fighting and realizing what we were really doing was bombing civilians when we

came over Berlin and stuff like that. I listen to it on the radio now, and they talk about attacking civilians and you think that's terrible. But it does affect the morale, I suppose.

T: How do you… did you think about that at the time when you were part of a bomber crew, part of this larger Air Force?

D: No. That's one thing about being in something like that. You're there in this enclosed space. Go over and do your thing. They talk bombs away and they're gone and as soon as they're dropped you get out of there and back home. Very impersonal.

T: Antiseptic in a way.

D: Yes. It is. It is. It is. Yes.

T: In those boxcars…

D: They were very small.

(2, A, 169)

T: They're probably the standard forty and eight boxcars.

D: Yes. We had about sixty guys on them. There wasn't room for everybody to lay down.

T: From your observation did some people handle that period of enclosure better than others?

D: I suppose, but I don't remember anybody ever getting cabin fever or anything like that. It was just boring. What was bad is that sometimes they'd stop. You'd might be in the thing for a day and nothing happened. So at least when you're on the move you know you're going towards some kind of an ending. It got kind of… but it wasn't claustrophobic. It just was… boring. That's all.

T: There was a lack of water you mentioned and were bathroom facilities also a problem?

D: Yes. They had a pail there that you could… but sometimes some of the guys would get diarrhea or something like that which makes it a little bit different. They would… I can't remember, but it seems to me every once in a while when they could get a chance, they would stop and empty this thing. But we were not the primary… it was not our train. In terms of ours, I mean our guards' train. They were hooked onto a train and where the train went, that's where we went and if it stopped, we stopped. If it didn't stop, we couldn't stop.

T: So from what you know you may have been hooked to several different engines on this…

D: Yes. Sure.

T: Very interesting. You ended up in Nuremberg. How was that facility different from the first one you had been in?

D: The camp at Nuremberg as I remember was a bigger camp probably. It was probably not… it was an older camp. I was just trying to remember. One of the experiences that I remember talking across a fence to a guy in another compound who I… I was talking to him. Everybody had an experience. I was talking to him about our… this tail gunner, the gunner that had been shot up… ball turret gunner who had been shot up in our crew.

(2, A, 204)

T: With the heel.

D: Yes. With the heel. The fellow that I was talking with I had been in Basic Training with. Now you can imagine this. I don't know where he was from, but anyway…

T: Way back in Amarillo, Texas?

D: Yes. So everybody has their story, and you tell your story and he tells his story. He asked me about what this guy's name was.

T: The ball turret gunner.

D: The ball turret gunner and I told him. He said, "I got his pants on." I mean, here I meet a guy that I met in Basic Training and this other thing.

T: He had clothes that had been recycled. That's right. You didn't have your own stuff on either.

D: Yes. And I said, "What happened to Wally?" We thought that maybe they would take the leg. But they took it, they had to take it off at the ankle. So they saved the knee. And he was repatriated.

T: Because he was so badly wounded.

D: Yes. So he didn't need those pants or something like that so this guy ended up with them. *(laughs)* So it's small world.

T: Yes, it is. Here's a guy from Basic Training who… your paths had diverged and suddenly in this one time and space they converge again.

D: Yes.

(2, A, 220)

T: Were the conditions at this second facility better, the same or more difficult than the first one?

D: It was more crowded. I would say the camp in the north might have been a newer camp. I don't remember a lot of difference. They were both okay.

T: Was the food about the same?

D: Yes. I suppose. I mean it was usually a stew of some kind. And they weren't exactly… they didn't exactly have a lot of food themselves. So it was just kind of a burden… It was basically German bread which we always talked about having sawdust in it because it was pretty… I mean this is not bread like you get around Taystee Bread. This was solid stuff that would sustain you.

T: Dense and heavy.

D: Yes.

T: For you, what was the most difficult thing at that second camp? You were there for a number of months I guess.

D: Yes. I guess the most difficult thing was, we were right near Nuremberg, and the [US] 8th Air Force and the British would come over and bomb the town every once in a while, and we're not that far from this thing. When the British would drop these… at night they would come over and drop flares. They would drop these huge bombs, and you could hear the explosion and see the… you could look out the window and see some of the flash. Then you'd hold onto the awning or the… we had doors that were… had windows… were closed anyway, and you'd… all of a sudden you'd feel the air jolt some in from that blast.

T: Wow. From a distance away.

D: Yes. From quite a distance away. But, geez, you know, when the Brits would come over at night… some people would get up and they'd move around. I guess the philosophy that some of us took, I took anyway, is if you're going to get it… *(trails off)* So I never bothered to get out of the bed and tromp around like that.

Then during the day, some mornings, the Americans would bomb Nuremberg. Not every day, but occasionally they would. I do remember one thing that I thought was typically American. They came over at noon one time. It was the

8th Air Force. And of course the 9th Air Force was the fighter groups. And these guys came over before the fact and put a big eight with smoke in the sky and a nine. Before the planes came over. Now can you imagine any more grand a thing?

(2, A, 260)

T: Letting them know who was there.

D: Yes.

T: So you could see some of this aerial activity from your camp.

D: Oh, yes. Sure. Yes. The thing that was… when you're being under that kind… even though we know… we kept saying, they know we're here. They're not going to… but the nervousness… you'd find your hands quivering like this. You'd try to stop the doggone thing and it had nothing to do with… I don't know… with fear. I suppose maybe. But it was just kind of a quaking like that. It was really kind of interesting.

And every once in a while you'd hear the town being bombed, and every once in a while you'd hear a big boom and you'd think, geez, somebody must have got hit and kicked the bomb out because that's what they used to do. If you were… the plane was wounded, you'd try to get rid of your bombs. Lighten it up, you know. That was always kind of shocker you know. We kept assuring everybody yes, they know we're here, where we are and all that kind of stuff. But every once in a while some would land… you know it could have been two miles away and you get this boom explosion.

(2, A, 275)

T: You could hear and feel that.

D: Oh, yes. And then you'd wait and you'd feel the thing go. You could feel the air rush coming.

T: What kind of physical condition were you in by this time? This is a number of months since you'd been shot down.

D: I was good. I mean most of us… I can remember most of us were teenagers or twenties and once in while you run across some guys that were in their forties you know. They really… we all thought they were eighty.

T: Sure. When you're nineteen, right?

D: Yes. But it was harder on them I'd say.

T: Yes. Physically.

D: Physically and mentally. When you're young like that nothing's going to happen

T: Did you lose any weight from the beginning to the end of your POW experience?

D: I don't know that I got weighed very much. I was always pretty slender so I don't know. I'm sure I did because we didn't eat that much but I didn't feel… I guess I didn't feel that I was just dying of hunger, but I would say this though that because of the boredom and so forth that the meals were one of the prime things that happened during the day. Whatever it was.

T: There wasn't much else the way you describe it.

D: No. There wasn't much else.

T: So you had a chance…

(2, A, 292)

D: Once in a while somebody would… you know, they'd get some smart head. They were usually British. In the Nuremberg camp that would have a radio. Somehow get the radio. They'd make one or something. They would tune in and get some news so they could tell you what the news was. But that's about the only input we got from the outside and it was very clandestine.

T: I see. So you were in a sense just kind of going through the days without much to do.

D: No.

T: In slightly overcrowded conditions it sounds like with food but not too much of it. Pretty much the same thing.

D: Yes.

T: Potatoes or soup or bread. And nonetheless…

D: With the Red Cross parcels also.

T: How often would you describe that you got those parcels?

D: We got a half a parcel. They were supposed to come I'm thinking two weeks, but I'm not sure of that. That always had… that had some jelly and had some cheese as I remember. I think it even had some canned milk in there. But it had some crackers. I can't remember what it was. It had a candy bar.

T: So those things that you got every so often…

D: Yes. Get a half a parcel maybe. That's the way it would come in. That was on the first camp area. Remember that. Because that was all organized. But after we got on the march and so forth you didn't see that.

T: The last stage of your POW experience was a forced march from the Nuremberg camp, XIII-D, to when you were finally liberated in April of 1945. What do you remember about that march? What were the conditions like in that experience?

(2, A, 314)

D: They were great. It was a stroll through the German countryside. I mean they had a few guards with us and these guys were older guys that were… this was a real… probably traumatic to them. We marched along in the column. It looked like a bunch of weirdoes because we had different… you know, you'd have some… I think I had a British Air Force battle jacket and a top and GI pants. Pretty much a… goofy looking guys walking along this thing. That's all we were doing. It was springtime. German countryside was beautiful. We were walking on the *Autobahn*.

T: If you think about it, how long, how many days, weeks, were you actually marching?

D: I'm thinking seven to nine days. Somewhere in there.

T: So it was not a long march.

D: That's what comes to my mind, but it was not… it was from Nuremberg down to some camp that was north of…

T: Munich I think. We looked at the map.

D: Yes. Right. Quite a ways north of Munich. It was going through Bavaria. It was beautiful country. If you wanted to walk off… somebody would say, "I think I'll take off." They'd say, "What the heck for? You're liable to get shot. You might as well stick around here. You can hear the guns all the time."

T: So at this point you felt pretty secure that the war was really just about over…

D: Yes.

T: And at any time you could be liberated.

D: Yes.

(2, A, 333)

T: What was difficult for you on that march?

D: I don't know. I don't think… I don't look upon that as being anything difficult. I was in fairly decent… relatively… physical shape. Being young. We had some food. It was new scenery all the time. I remember every day there were a couple of Allied planes that would circle around the sky maybe at noontime. Just to kind of keep track. There was one day. I think the first day when we were out. This long column marching. We did actually get strafed by some Allied planes. Thunderbolts as I remember. Came down. One and another one. I think the first fired, maybe the second. Boy, everybody left the road quickly. There was woods on the side of us. Then I think they recognized what it was and then they took off. Every day after that there was always a couple of planes way up high who would just kind of circle. You could see that they were just kind of keeping track of us.

T: Making sure you were there.

D: Yes. Right.

T: That strafing incident. Was anybody wounded with that?

D: It was hard to tell. It happened behind us. These guys… you could hear the… when the plane dives *(plane sound)* you look back and you hear some *(machine gun sounds)* like that and you think holy cats! Everybody just disappears. Then these things… I think there maybe have been two of them fired. Then they didn't do it anymore but they would… they took off and every once in a while you'd see… We got so we could hear the insect sound… if a plane was within three hundred miles of us you could pick that up *(humming sound)*. It really was anxious. But everybody kept saying that they know we're here now. There would be a plane come over and circle around and then take off.

(2, A, 358)

T: So that sounds like there was a bit of… that was the real threat perhaps at this point. Not the Germans.

D: No.

T: But the Americans.

D: We were actually… guys were taking off. When we'd camp down someplace, some of the guys would wander off into the countryside. They had cigarettes or soap or something like that you got through the Red Cross and they would barter and bring back a couple of eggs or something. So it was… nobody was… you could take off if you wanted to.

T: The way you describe it you felt safer with the column than by leaving it.

D: Yes. Yes.

T: As you walked then, did you go through any German villages or towns where you encountered civilians? You, yourself.

D: I remember we were near some towns and things. I don't remember… it would have been small communities. I don't remember going through a town that had four or five blocks to it or anything like that. Maybe there was a way we bypassed that because our column was… it could have been a couple miles long for all I know.

T: That's a lot of guys. They cleared this camp out completely. You were all just going in the same direction.

D: Yes.

T: From your description you were in a camp when you were liberated by the Americans. Is that correct?

D: Right.

T: Do you know what American unit it was that came there?

D: Third Army. I saw General Patton.

(2, A, 375)

T: You saw General Patton. So it was in the south for sure. What were your thoughts and feelings at the moment of liberation when this was actually ended?

D: It wasn't a surprise. We knew they were coming. We heard… we had some… I don't know where we got the feedback, but… we weren't being monitored very much by the Germans. But they talked about… they're coming. They're going to come through tonight. Somebody said, they're not going to come through at night. That would be dumb. But the next morning a guy shows up. Major of some kind, and a couple of guys. The Germans pretty well cleared out.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

T: You mentioned the Germans cleared out and kind of left the camp here. This is a camp you were not in for very long at all, right?

D: No. There was all kinds… this last camp was a multi-national camp. I mean there was <u>everybody</u> there too.

T: Had other people there arrived very recently as you had or was this an older, established camp?

D: I don't know. They kept us pretty much to ourselves.

T: Just with other Americans?

D: Yes.

T: When you left this camp, did you leave it right away to go to an American facility?

D: No. They told us to stay there. Because they were going to take us back. They said, don't take off and start going off. But we were free. We wandered around the countryside. There wasn't anybody around anyway. There weren't any soldiers around. We could go where you want to.

I remember one time there were three or four of us. Somehow we ended up at some house where there were two ladies there. German women. And these were middle-aged women as I recall. They gave us something to eat I think. I think we even spent the night there. I think they gave us some pillows or something. We were just kind of screwing around. Just walking out in the countryside and it got dark and so we decided we better find someplace to go.

T: So your physical condition, the way you've described it, you were not in that bad a shape. You were able to…

D: No. I was in good shape. I didn't have… it was a lark, you know. I mean I was learning things. I'm young and it was an experience. Just like taking a trip somewhere.

T: You weren't even twenty yet.

D: No.

T: Nineteen years old. Wow.

D: Maybe it was twenty.

T: Let's see. You were born in July. This was May of '45, so a couple months shy of twenty it looks like. You were repatriated to France with most other ex-POWs from German camps to Camp Lucky Strike at Le Havre.

D: Yes.

T: Talk about your time there. How did the Americans process you back into the American military?

D: I don't think there was much organization. It was a big tent city as I recall. You could get passes from there to go to Paris. Maybe… by this time nobody really cared too much. We're not following strict rules or anything like that. But I remember you got a three day pass, a couple of us, and went to Paris and having fun. Came back and later went again. Had a three day pass. That was up and we didn't want to come back so this one guy went into an office of some kind and duplicated the form and signed it. So we had another three days. Then we stayed another three days after that even using… I had… the MPs stopped us once and looked at it. Just said, "POW?" I said, "Yes." They said, "Okay." They didn't care.

(2, B, 455)

T: Things had relaxed considerably it sounds like.

D: Yes. They had.

T: One thing I was curious about. You were listed as missing in action. What did your parents know and when did they know it?

D: I've seen the telegram. I probably have it somewhere. My folks are both gone. They got a telegram that said I was missing in action. "We regret to inform you…" I've seen that. Then I thought that would probably get my dad. He had a heart problem. But it didn't do it. Oh, it must have been a couple months later that they got another telegram that said that the German government had advised them that their son was a prisoner of war. That made them feel better. But they did get that information.

T: Were you able to send any letters or postcards to them or did you get any mail from them?

D: No. I didn't get any mail from them although people who had been there longer maybe had got some. I did write a card. When you first got there you had postcard that you could just fill out your name. Just the bare essentials and they sent that out. They did get that I think while I was still in there. It takes a long time to go through the channels. I don't remember whether they got a letter. I wrote a letter. You'd get kind of a form thing that you could send out. I think I sent one of those out. It seems to me they did get one of those too.

T: When you got back to the States and talked to your folks, what impression did you get or what did they tell you about how they dealt with you're being missing in action and a POW?

D: My dad had died. He had a heart attack. I knew he had a bad heart. I thought he would. He knew I was a prisoner of war. I thought maybe the fact of missing in action would be more than he could handle. But he survived that.

(2, B, 499)

T: He died before you got back?

D: Yes. Yes. I guess everybody… I don't really know how they felt. I guess they all felt… they knew I was alive and okay. I imagine when they just found out that I was missing in action that was probably pretty hard on them.

T: Did your mom talk much about that when you saw her again here back in the States?

D: No. Now that I think about it. Not really. No. I think I told you I had a brother that was born while I was missing.

T: That's right. He was twenty years younger than you.

D: Yes.

T: So your mom in a sense had a POW and a newborn.

D: That's right.

T: That's a heck of a combination.

D: Yes, it is.

T: When you got back here to the States, how soon was it before you got to see your mother?

D: They didn't hold us up. We came into a processing center in New York I think it was. I don't think they took more than two days there.

T: You were back in St. Paul it sounds like a couple months after you were actually released from that camp.

D: Yes.

(2, B, 519)

T: With a stop at Le Havre and then… did you ship across the Atlantic coming back?

D: Yes.

T: To New York.

D: Yes.

T: How much did your mother ask you about your POW experience?

D: I don't know. I don't remember. I told mom the story, but I don't remember her asking a lot of questions beyond that.

T: Did you have other relatives in the Twin Cities area?

D: Yes. My grandparents. My maternal grandparents.

T: How curious were other people? Other family or other friends to hear about what you had been through as a POW?

D: They all kind of wanted to hear. It got to be kind of a joke because everybody has a story, you know. All of us had a story. Everybody was happy to deliver this story. Yes. I guess people asked me about it. Practically everybody I knew.

T: How did you decide how much to tell people about what your POW experience had been like?

D: I guess I was willing to tell them anything I've told you. I really don't… it was not a bad experience.

T: And certainly it was less than a year. You were actually in captivity.

D: Yes.

T: What kind of help did the military… or assistance did the military provide with physical recovery or with psychological recovery?

(2, B, 545)

D: It's interesting. There was some talk of that. From my perspective it sounded stupid. I didn't have any… I didn't have anything wrong with me. I guess somewhere along the line they took us through a processing center and they gave you some talking to and stuff like that. But I don't remember getting any particular treatment. *(chuckles)* I'll have to admit I've got a ten percent… I was awarded a ten percent disability based on general anxiety as a prisoner of war.

T: Was this awarded right after the war ended then or later?

D: I think later.

T: What level of disability do you get now? Still ten percent?

D: Yes. This is off the cuff but they, the Veterans Administration, is going for an increase. I suppose cost of living. It's probably important to some guys. They asked if I wanted to be a part of that and I said, I feel stupid enough. How am I going… if give general anxiety how would you say that that's worse or better or anything? I said I'm not going to go for any degrees. I felt dumb enough about getting this thing [disability payment] to begin with.

T: So you feel that… and this is one of the sort of preemptive… where I was going with this… you have a disability through the Veterans Administration and the way you describe it almost to paraphrase it, you feel that that's the most you should be getting because you don't feel there's really anything war related.

D: Yes. That's the way I feel.

T: How much contact did you have with the VA in the years after the war?

D: I don't know. Not much. I went to school on the GI Bill. Not much except for that process. I was discharged and said goodbye to them. So the only contact really has been in negotiations on this. The VFW is kind of an agent that works with the Veterans Administration on those kinds of things. So I feel that what I'm getting is fine. It's nice.

(2, B, 584)

T: Are you associated or a member of the VFW?

D: No.

T: Is that something you did in the past or have never been part of?

D: No. I never have. A lot of the guys, I think sometimes, being in the service was the biggest thing that happened to them. I don't feel that way. It was a good experience.

T: As a chapter in your life in a sense?

D: Yes.

T: It's interesting you mention that because we have talked to people for whom their war experience whatever it was, was in a sense, the most exciting thing that ever happened to them. Now for you, you've contextualize that in the sense that you have other experiences that you see as more important to you personally or in a way.

D: Yes.

T: Where do you put your military experience, those two years as a gunner and a POW, in your longer life history?

D: I think that it's an experience. A lot of people are interested in World War II. I've given… I've been asked a number of different times to tell about my experiences and people that have not had any experience like that, it's always interesting. I like to listen to people talk about things that I don't know about. I've talked at church about it. Given my tale. And a few things. But it's probably less important to me now than it was.

T: Have you always had an easy time, as easy time as today shall we say, talking about this experience?

D: Sure.

T: Yes?

D: Sure.

(2, B, 608)

T: In a hypothetical sense, if I'd ask you in the 1950s at age thirty or age thirty-five for the same interview, what might you have said?

D: Probably the same thing.

T: Same thing?

D: Yes.

T: Concluding here. A couple things. As a student at the University of Minnesota in the late forties or during the years that you worked for 3M here in the Twin Cities, how much did other people know about your POW experience?

D: *(chuckles)* It was enough of an experience to me so that if the opportunity provided itself I'd be happy to talk about it. It was fun to listen to other people talk about where they'd been and what they'd done. You get a bunch a guys together and lots of times the war experience is the only thing that they had that's worth talking about.

T: So for you, being a POW was nothing you felt a sense of shame or guilt about…

D: No.

T: You had no reluctance to talk about it.

D: No.

T: Finally, what do you think is the most important way that your POW experience specifically may have changed you or changed your life?

(2, B, 625)

D: I suppose it made me more self-sufficient. It was… from a spiritual standpoint I guess I felt God was with me, kept praying like I always have been. I don't know… it was an experience that I am happy to talk about. People are interested that don't, like I said before, that either were too young or haven't been in situations like that, and sometimes… if I have the opportunity if somebody wants to hear, I'll be happy to talk about it. I know that Jim Gerber… he's with a group of guys that apparently talk about these things. He's kind of into World War II. He's asked me to come over there. A bunch of guys are getting together.

T: July 12?

D: I think so. Yes.

T: You mentioned faith a moment ago.

D: Yes.

T: Pick up on that. Would you describe yourself as a particularly religious person when you went in the service as a young man?

D: Sure. Yes. Sure. I mean… yes. I was a regular church-goer. I was an American Baptist and I believe very firmly in God and I prayed a lot and I really felt that God was with me in the tight spots. I suppose that was a good part of my self-confidence.

T: When you were a POW as well?

D: Yes. Sure. And I remember… it was something that… what was it that I… somehow I had… I didn't wear a cross or anything like that but somehow I remember one of the guards, German guards, saying to me, showing some surprise that I was a Christian. *(chuckles)* I remember thinking to myself, "What do you think you are?" I didn't see any inconsistency with that. I wasn't a conscientious objector or anything like that. My country was at war. So that was kind of strange.

T: As a Christian, did you have any difficulties reconciling your faith with your mission? In a sense you were part of a bomber crew.

D: Yes. No. You know. I don't know that… I felt that I was fighting against something that was evil. That's what you hear. So I felt that. I guess war is certainly… a lot of people that are Christians that fought wars. You kind of hold your

faith life different than… separate from that. Yes. I did a lot of praying and I guess I feel that prayer does things.

T: Do you feel that your faith changed in any respect, in any way, because of this?

D: It probably strengthened. It was a confirmation of the way I felt. God is taking care of me. You can say well, a lot of other guys that God didn't take care of. I don't know. You can get into a lot of philosophy, but all I can say is that my belief is very strong and I guess I feel that it has sustained me over a lot of different difficult situation.

T: Mr. Brownlee, that's the last question I have. I'm wondering if there's anything else that you wanted to add at this point.

D: No. Not that I can think of. I guess… being in the Air Force the war is much more remote than it would be fighting on the ground. I really think that, sure people got shot up and so forth like that, but you would… here we would come back to England, eat in the mess hall, and you could go to the movie and that kind of stuff and then you go over there and are in danger and then you come back.

T: Two different worlds in a way.

D: It's two different worlds. Two different worlds. I really had a lot of respect for people who were fighting on the ground. I don't know how I would have… I guess you just kind of get trained and you do what you're told to and try to help everybody else.

T: It sounds like you're saying you felt fortunate in a sense that you weren't on the ground.

D: Right.

T: Even though you got shot out of the air.

D: Yes.

T: On the record, let me thank you very much for your time today.

D: Glad to give it to you.

END OF INTERVIEW